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ISAIAH 14. 12

הִילֵל בֶּן שָׁחַר

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THERE is a consensus of opinion that the expression הִילֵל בֶּן שָׁחַר in Isaiah 14. 12 denotes the morning star. This meaning is attached to the word by the older versions. The Targum renders it נִוְהָא, the term by which that planet is usually designated. The old commentators accepted that rendering, which holds the field to the present day.

There can be no doubt that הִילֵל here is derived from הָלַל 'to light, to sparkle'. It has that meaning in the *Kal* in Job 29. 3, בָּהֶלְו נָרוּ עָלַי רֹאשִׁי *when his lamp shined above my head*, and in the *Hiphil* in Isaiah 13. 10, לֹא יִהְיוּ אֲוֵרִים *shall not give their light*; Job 31. 26, כִּי יִהְיֶה *the sun when it shines*, *ibid.* 11. 10, חָהַל אֲוִיר *flash forth light*.

The metaphor in our passage is meant to describe a heavenly body, that outshines all others, and is therefore applied to a king, who dominates over and subjugates all others, an overlord who has brought the whole world to his feet. It is, therefore, thought that it is a most apt figure to compare such a conqueror with that star, which is still brilliant in the morning when all other stars have lost their light and become invisible. This is further thought to be clinched by the apposition בֶּן שָׁחַר 'the son of the dawn, the son of the morning'. Is not Venus the star which retains its brilliancy after all others have been darkened?

For all that, the translation of הִילֵל by 'Venus' has its

difficulties. In the first place, that star does not eclipse, but only outlives the others for a short time; how can it then metaphorically designate the conqueror 'who had laid low the nations', and now 'has fallen from heaven, and been brought down to the ground'? Secondly, the cruel tyrant of our chapter 'had made the earth tremble, shaken kingdoms, made the world as a wilderness, overthrown its cities, and had not loosed the prisoners to their homes' (vv. 16, 17); who in his arrogant ambition 'had said in his heart, I will ascend unto heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will rise above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'.

How can the morning star, with its soft, gentle brilliancy, be the emblem of such an overbearing and overpowering oppressor? It would be a very feeble likeness of such ambitions, nor has that star any of the ruling powers in heaven, so as to symbolize these aspirations. The morning star has been aptly connected with love and magic, but would be useless as a poetical comparison with a king who intended to become the monarch of the whole world.

It is the term *בן שחר* 'the son of the morning', which is misleading here. There is only one heavenly body which can serve as an emblem of the aspirations of an overlord of the world—and that is the sun. The sun is the child of the dawn, born after the darkness of the night out of its beautiful appearance. Thence he ascends the heaven; he exalts his throne above the stars of God; he rises above the heights of the clouds; he is like the Most High, being worshipped as such by many nations. Great kings have taken the sun as their device. Louis XIV called himself *le Roi Soleil*; the flatterers who surrounded his court would never have called him 'the morning star'.

We have the contemporary example of striving to have a place in the sun. The arms of Prussia represent an eagle flying in the face of the sun, and bearing the legend *nec soli cedit*, 'he yields not his place to the sun'. Had William of Hohenzollern come triumphantly out of the latest conflict, the host of admirers who would have exalted his name would not have compared him with the morning star.

The sun is used as an emblem in the coat of arms of many States and dominions, and it would be quite superfluous to point them out. In the above-mentioned passage of Isaiah, the root הלל is applied to the stars, the sun, and the moon; in Job 31. 26 it is used directly of the sun; whilst in Job 41. 10 it occurs in parallelism with עפעפי שחר *the eyelids of the morning*.

I do not hesitate to suggest that הלל בן שחר in our passage denotes the illuminating star, born out of the dawn—the sun.